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COEDUCATION.

A LETTER

TO THE

HON. G. W. ROSS, M.P.P.,

MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

BY

DANIEL WILSON, LL.D., F.R.S.E.,

PRESIDENT OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TORONTO.

Toronto:

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TO THE
HONORABLE G. W. ROSS, M.P.P.,
&c., &c., &c.,
MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

DEAR SIR,

I learn from the reported proceedings of the Provincial Legislature that the following resolution was adopted on the 5th instant :—

“ That inasmuch as the Senate of the Provincial University, having for several years admitted women to the university examinations and class lists, and inasmuch as a considerable number of women have availed themselves of the privilege, but labour under the disadvantage of not having access to any institution which affords tuition necessary in the higher years in the course : in the opinion of this House provision should be made for the admission of women to University College.”

It can scarcely be necessary to point out the essential difference between admitting women to university examinations and their entering as fellow-students with the young men in University College. Whatever may be the final decision on the latter question, it must be based on different grounds. The correspondence called for, and submitted to the Legislature in previous years, has fully informed you of the course thus far pursued by the Council of University College in reference to applications by women for admission as students. Nevertheless, it may be well that I recall the terms of their original response. The honourable member by whom the above resolution was submitted to the House is reported to have spoken as follows :—

“ The question arose, ‘ Why were women equally with the male sex not to enjoy the same facilities for obtaining higher education ? ’ The college through its council had said, ‘ We sympathize with these young ladies ; we think they should have all the advantages of higher education ; we are willing

to do that which lies within our power to confer on them these advantages ; but they must not enter the precincts of University College, because we think that due order and discipline would thereby be endangered.' ”

This question of “ due order and discipline,” appears to have been repeatedly referred to in a way which seemed to imply that the only idea entertained of the well-ordered discipline indispensable for efficient application to study is the prevention of riotous disorder. Whatever is calculated to divert the student's mind from systematic devotion to the studies required of him is incompatible with due order and discipline. The lady principal of Girton College says: “ I should expect co-education, at the age suitable for college life, to have a distracting effect on the minds of the young women at any rate. I have not considered the subject as it regards the young men. I should think it would add other excitements to that attendant on the pursuit of knowledge.”

The following, however, is the original and unanimous resolution of the College Council as reported to the Legislative Assembly, in reply to their order of date, 13th February, 1882 :—

“ The College Council are prepared to give their heartiest co-operation to any well-considered plan for securing the advantages of higher education for women, and will be prepared, to the fullest extent of their ability, to bear a part in such education, if a college for ladies is provided ; but the Council, after mature consideration, are satisfied that the co-education of young men and women in large numbers in the same college, is open to grave objections ; and they feel it to be their duty to adhere to the practice of the College from its foundation.”

The introducer of the resolution is further reported to have said :

“ There was no word in the University Act which in his opinion warranted the authorities in excluding ladies from the lectures of the college, and it seemed to him that those who had taken the responsibility of excluding them had assumed an authority to which probably they were not entitled. He had been informed that, unless some measures were taken by the House or the Government in order to place ladies on that footing which they claimed they were entitled to, it would be necessary for them, in self-defence, to take proceedings in the courts by way of mandamus to obtain these privileges. He had no doubt but that they had good grounds for taking the matter into court. He proceeded to point out that for years past co-education had existed

in connection with the High schools, Normal schools, and Collegiate Institutes of the country ; and as the position in University College would be no different to these institutions, he failed to see why it should not be allowed in the Provincial College."

As the ideas thus set forth appear to have been reiterated by other members of the Legislature, and necessarily involve a reflection on myself and the College Council, as pursuing a course inconsistent with the University Act, I beg leave very respectfully to submit that University College is conducted now, as it has been from the first, in accordance with the invariable practice in older seats of learning to which it has been customary to look as our models in academic usage. As to the threat of proceedings in the Courts of Law to compel the admission of lady students to the College, I presume that, in such case, it will devolve on the Attorney-General or yourself to appear as defendant. As President and Professors of the Provincial College, I and my colleagues are the servants of the Province, appointed by the Crown to perform certain duties ; subject to the Orders of the Lieutenant-Governor in Council ; and to statutes which are only valid after receiving such confirmation. We do not question for a moment the absolute authority of the Provincial Legislature to make whatever changes they may see fit in the constitution or purposes of the College ; and whatever those may be, it will be our duty to carry them out. But so long as such changes are under discussion, I should fail in my duty as President of the College if I did not submit to you my reasons for apprehending injury to the institution from any proposed change.

I beg leave, therefore, very respectfully to submit to you, as Minister of Education, that, so far from the admission of ladies as students being in accordance with the constitution of this College, it is a departure from all past procedure ; and a change of the most radical kind, involving results which many experienced educationists view with grave anxiety. Permit me further to add that I do not find the appeal to usage in the Schools and Collegiate Institutes of Canada, as made by more than one speaker, to be borne out by facts. The Normal School for the training of teachers is an altogether exceptional case, as is recognised by the very special regulations there enforced, which, so far from

favours the free intercourse of the sexes while in pursuit of a common course of instruction, aim at enforcing the avoidance of all personal intercourse, even after the hours spent in receiving instruction. Any such discipline, if desirable, is only possible in an institution where the students aim at a professional status, and can be compelled to render obedience to any code of laws. But another feature of the same institution is its Model School, which, by its very designation, is intended as a model for the whole Province; and there an absolute separation of the sexes prevails. This is still more noticeable and significant in the Collegiate Institute. The building now occupied by University College was completed in 1860, in accordance with plans maturely considered with a view to meet every requirement of a thoroughly equipped College. They had the full approval of the Government, of the Chancellor and Senate of the University, and of the College Council. The Senate then included among its active members the late Chancellor Blake, Chief Justice Draper, and other high legal authorities; but no single individual at so recent a date entertained the thought of female students as a possibility ever contemplated in the University Act; and the building is accordingly so arranged that any attempt at adequate provision for their reception now will involve very considerable and costly alterations.

The Collegiate Institute building in Toronto, erected still more recently, has, on the contrary, been planned throughout for the reception of both male and female students; but so far is it from indicating any favour for co-education, that ample provision is everywhere made for their separation. The central building includes the common hall in which they meet for morning prayer; but during all their hours of study they are as entirely apart as if they were in separate buildings; and the present able Principal gives the system his strongest approval. I am assured, moreover, by the head of one of our educational institutions, who has enjoyed exceptionally favourable opportunities of learning the views of teachers in this Province, that many heads of Collegiate Institutes and High Schools would gladly welcome a similar arrangement.

All this proves how largely the element of economy influences the practice of co-education, even in our preparatory institutions.

The remark made to me recently, by a gentleman of long experience as the Principal of a Collegiate Institute, was, that I "need not fear so much for the young men. It is the young women who suffer most from co-education." Looking to the illustrations to which I have referred, and even to the extent to which boys and girls are kept apart in our best organized city schools, I may be permitted to protest against the statement that co-education is recognised throughout the educational system of Ontario as in all respects preferable; and to smile at the complacent assumption that I and others who have questioned the wisdom of bringing young men and women together at the most critical period of their lives, in all the attractive relations of undergraduate rivalry, are the mere representatives of antiquated prejudice.

HIGHER EDUCATION.

Having said thus much, permit me in the next place to press upon your attention the essential distinction between the question of The Higher Education of Women and that of Co-education: for in recent discussions they have been to a large extent treated as one and the same. It is with reluctance that I revert to any personal aspect of this question; but I must protest against references to myself as one out of sympathy with the claims of women to the highest educational privileges. It is now fifteen years since, mainly through my own personal exertions, the Toronto Ladies' Educational Association was organized. In the opening address, which I delivered in the Music Hall, on the 22nd of October, 1869, it was remarked: "We meet to-day for the purpose of inaugurating a movement which aims at securing for ladies facilities for training in the highest departments of mental culture, in some degree corresponding to those available for young men;" and after referring to the want of adequate provision for female education in the higher branches of letters, philosophy and science; it is added:—"The need of something more cannot be doubted. To what extent the want is as yet felt among ourselves, the present movement is designed in some degree to test."

The Association thus begun was carried on successfully from 1869 to 1877, when it was allowed to drop by the ladies' commit-

tee who had undertaken its management, owing to causes apart from its special object, to which it is not necessary to refer. But during the whole of that period I delivered regular courses of lectures to large classes of ladies, embracing the same subjects as were taught by me in University College. Similar courses were given on their respective subjects by Professors Croft, Cherriman, Loudon, Young and Nicholson, along with Professor Goldwin Smith, Mr. Buchan, now Principal of Upper Canada College, and others. The Report of the sixth Session, which I happen to have preserved, shows that regular examinations continued to be held at the close of each session. In the first year the number of lady students amounted to upwards of 150. In subsequent years they increased till the hall of the Canadian Institute proved inadequate to accommodate their growing numbers; and the late Minister of Education granted the use of the large lecture room of the Technological College for the purpose. These, let me repeat, were not popular lectures; but of a strictly academic character, corresponding to those given to the College students. That I did not undervalue the influence of educated women, is shown in the following brief extract from "the same inaugural address: "I see in this bright hopes for the future. A class of highly-educated women in our midst would do more to elevate the tone of feeling, and to awaken nobler aspirations in the intellectual manhood of this young country, than anything else I can conceive of. I see no other means in any degree equally calculated to wean our young men of high promise from the enslavement of professional pursuits; the mere trading drudgery, whether it be of commerce or medicine, of the counting-house or the bar, which seems now their highest goal."

The success which attended the movement in Toronto for the Higher Education of Women led to our example being followed in Kingston and Montreal. On two occasions I visited Montreal and delivered the opening lecture of the Ladies' Association for their Winter Session. The scheme thus inaugurated there has been carried on with uninterrupted success, and has been crowned by the liberal bequest of a wealthy citizen for the purpose of founding a Ladies' College.

CO-EDUCATION.

But, as I have already said, this question of Higher Education and that of Co-education are essentially different. Nay, more, while I have thus far objected to the admission of lady students to University College as a radical change in its constitution, and an experiment of doubtful issue, so far as its present students are concerned: I have opposed it even more confidently in the true interest of women. I am strongly convinced of the justice of President Eliot's remark:—"It is certain that as our country advances in wealth and refinement the method of educating together young men and young women of 18 to 22 years of age, as it exists to-day in the new communities of our Western States, will be less and less in favour with the people who can afford to give their children collegiate education. Even now the method finds no acceptance in New England, with the most insignificant exceptions. For the Collegiate education of the two sexes together there is but one respectable argument, namely, Poverty!" If the remarks of various speakers have been correctly reported, not a few of the members of the Legislature of Ontario concurred with yourself in acknowledging that, apart from this question of economy or "poverty," they would much prefer to any scheme of co-education, such provision for the lady students of Ontario as that of Newnham Hall, Cambridge. The same is the avowed opinion of many whose names have been incorrectly quoted as advocates of co-education, such as Principal Nelles, Principal Austin, Professor Young, &c. Principal Dawson, of Montreal, is even more decided in his disapproval of co-education, except where poverty leaves no other alternative.

A great array of evidence is nevertheless adduced from the practise in vogue in many Colleges in the United States; but careful study and enquiry lead me to doubt the value of their example as a guide for Ontario. Alike from personal knowledge and from trustworthy report I am satisfied that their standard of education, and the system pursued in many of the Western Colleges, preclude the idea of any profitable appeal to their example. But Cornell is adduced; and the evidence of President White is

held as a sufficient offset to that of President Eliot, of Harvard. Those who do so are probably not aware of the relative value of the evidence. President Eliot, an experienced educationist, actively engaged in the work of his own College, did not adopt the final opinion to which he has given expression till he had satisfied himself by careful personal observation and enquiry into the results of Co-education in other Colleges, where, as he says, "the experiment of giving a collegiate education to women is complicated with the social experiment of bringing scores or hundreds of young men and women into intimate relations in the same institution at the excitable age of eighteen to twenty-two;" and, as he further adds, as the result of his observation of the social life and manners of the new communities where co-education most largely prevails, "The risks which unguarded youth must run increase as society becomes more and more complex." On the other hand, President White has, since the introduction of co-education at Cornell, been to a large extent precluded from personal observation. He has accepted diplomatic appointments; was ambassador at Berlin for upwards of two years; and subsequently engaged in other political missions; in addition to which, on the ground of health, he has for long periods been absent from the University. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that his report of the unqualified success of co-education there is not confirmed by all who have watched the progress of the experiment. Notwithstanding the provision of an ample endowment by an enthusiastic advocate of "Woman's Rights," the result, so far, in point of numbers, clearly indicates that thoughtful parents in the States, as well as elsewhere, give the preference to Vassar, Smith, Wells, and other Ladies' Colleges, rather than risk the doubtful experiment of sending their daughters to "refine, and bring under wholesome female influences," some three or four hundred stranger youths, as their fellow-students of the rougher sex. It has, moreover, already been found expedient to erect at Cornell a special female college residence, and to place the lady students under the superintendence of a principal and others of their own sex.

But if the success of co-education at Cornell is doubtful, the University of Michigan is triumphantly appealed to, with its female students in law and medicine. The answer, however, is

easily given. Principal Austin, of Alma College, St. Thomas, is one of those whose names have been marshalled as supporters of co-education. But all that he does say is that "if something better is not available," it is the most economical method. But he adds, "it may be doubted if Co-education will meet the demands of the people. Parents will, as a rule, prefer separate colleges. I fully agree with the remark made to me by Dr. Angell, President of the Michigan University:—'The majority of young women seeking higher education will do so at colleges specially designed for women.'"

But no commentary on the subject of Co-education is more instructive than the uncompromising defence of the system by the President of Oberlin College. There, as the members of the Legislature have been informed, it has been longest carried on, and, according to its advocates, with triumphant success. Some of the results which President Fairchild deems it important to state are, no doubt, satisfactory, in a sense. Of eighty-four lady graduates, for example, he tells us that only twenty-three—nearly all of them among the youngest,—remain unmarried. With the inevitable influences which thus come into play as the result of bringing together in close intimacy of undergraduate life young men and women at the most susceptible age, President Fairchild thus deals:—"Will not the young people form such acquaintances as will result, during their course of study, or after they leave school, in matrimonial engagements? Undoubtedly they will; and if this is a fatal objection, the system must be pronounced a failure. The majority of young people form such acquaintances between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, and these are the years devoted to a course of study. It would be a most unnatural state of things if such acquaintances should not be made in a school where young men and young women are gathered in large numbers; nor is it to be expected that marriage engagements will not be formed more or less frequently. Now and then it may occur that parties will seem to have left school for the purpose of consummating such an engagement,"—or, in other words, have abandoned their studies, and left the college to get married!

The circumstances at Oberlin are, however, widely different from those at Toronto. It is the educational institution of a re-

ligious community, where the students of both sexes may be assumed to correspond in social as well as denominational relations; and where, therefore—if such a condition of things as President Fairchild describes can be imagined as in any degree compatible with the objects for which it has hitherto been assumed that young men and women do go to college,—the least amount of evil is to be apprehended.

As a specimen of the arguments of one of the most uncompromising advocates of co-education, President Fairchild's defence appears to me more instructive than all the arguments of its opponents; and in view of such inevitable results of co-education, the Council of University College may be pardoned if they did apprehend the possibility of novel impediments to College discipline.

With the evidence before me, of which I have thus endeavoured to present a brief summary, in order that you may more clearly understand the grounds on which I have thus far acted, I should have culpably failed in my duty, as President of University College, if I had yielded to the temptations of an easy and popular course. At the same time, let me here state that, should it be decided to throw open the College lecture-rooms to women, I do not anticipate a large influx of lady students. On the contrary, I view such a movement as a heavy blow to the cause of Higher Education for Women in Ontario. At Owen's College, Manchester, the attempt was made to introduce the system; but it was found that there were ladies earnestly desirous of such facilities for higher study, who shrunk from the incidents inevitable to their intermingling with a large body of male students; and there, accordingly—in the centre of the most advanced opinions in reference to education as well as politics,—they have followed the example of the older Universities, and established a separate college for women.

The experiment so successfully tried in Toronto for a period of eight years, of classes similar in character to those in University College, but exclusively for ladies, was rewarded with a large and ever increasing attendance, till I had the gratification of lecturing in the Technological College to crowded classes. Such, I believe, will be the permanent result if a Ladies' College is organized in connection with the University of Toronto. But I have

the assurance of many ladies that they will not attend lectures; and of others of mature years, that they would not entertain the idea of their daughters entering as students, at a college where they must be thrown into more or less familiar intercourse with between three and four hundred young men. I have also the assurance of parents that they will hesitate to send their sons to a college where they are thrown into such intimate relations, as fellow-students, with strangers of the other sex.

I have thus endeavoured to lay before you the grounds of my objection to the introduction of co-education at University College. The institution has progressed hitherto with gratifying success, and is now universally recognized as an educational institution worthily fulfilling the purposes for which the fathers of this country, with wise providence, set apart a portion of the public domain, while Western Canada was still an uncleared wilderness. I cannot imagine that the Legislature and the Executive Council of Ontario will hastily concur in subjecting the Provincial College to an experiment, the results of which are viewed so differently by men of long experience and eminent standing as educationalists. I still entertain the hope that the Attorney-General will recognise the expediency of referring the whole subject to a select committee, or to a commission entrusted with the duty of obtaining thorough information to guide the Government and the Legislature in their final decision.

The question is one of the gravest importance in the whole issues which it involves; and in so far as I can judge from the reported debates in the Legislative Assembly, it is still an open question with the Government. Speaking apparently not as Minister of Education, but simply in your capacity as a member of the Legislature; and as though the final decision rested, not with the Government, but with me, you are reported to have said:—

“He (Mr. G. W. Ross) was convinced that when President Wilson knew that the sentiment of all the educators of the country was in favour of these privileges being given to women he would withdraw his opposition. He was speaking for himself only. His sympathies were in favour of the higher education of women. He would be willing to support an appropriation to enable them to acquire that, and he would do so on public grounds. As far

as admission to Toronto University was concerned, he was free to say that he would prefer if something like Newnham Hall, at Cambridge, could be provided."

I must here repeat that it may be assumed without hesitation that all the educators of the country are agreed as to the indisputable right of woman to higher education. On the subject of Co-education, as your own remarks show, there is by no means such unanimity of opinion. The only other member of the Government, so far as appears, who took part in the debate, the Honourable the Commissioner of Public Works, after complimenting the mover and seconder on the manner in which the resolution had been introduced, is reported to have given his decided verdict against Co-education in these terms:—

"He was not convinced that the entire view they had presented was the correct one for the House. He did not agree that the matter should be disposed of on the ground of economy. There was a higher, broader view to be taken. He was in favour of higher education of women, but he was not in favour of university co-education."

I have hitherto felt it to be in strict fulfilment of the duties entrusted to me, when I accepted the responsible office of President of University College, to maintain unchanged the system which I found in operation. I have here endeavoured respectfully to lay before you the reasons which have thus far actuated me in the course I have pursued, with a no less earnest aim at the promotion of the higher education of women on a sound and lasting basis, than at the maintenance of the Provincial College in unimpaired efficiency. I am gratified to learn that, in all essential points, my views have your approval; and that if you suggest a deviation from the course which your judgment commands, it is solely on grounds of economic expediency.

You occupy the honourable position of responsible minister, entrusted with the conduct of an educational system in which the Province of Ontario takes just pride, as in many respects a model of efficiency, and an example to the Dominion. After so much has been accomplished in all other respects as the results of wise liberality, and with the hearty approval of the people, it will be a just cause of regret if the still unaccomplished object of

the higher education of women is attempted to be carried out on a system of compromise and acknowledged inefficiency, from a reluctance to extend to it the same reasonable expenditure as has been ungrudgingly approved of in every other branch.

Had I heartily approved of the admission of female students to this College, on a basis of the co-education of the sexes, instead of questioning both its wisdom and expediency, I should not have felt at liberty to introduce so fundamental a change in the College system without authority. But with the educational policy of the Government still undecided, I beg leave very respectfully to represent to you the injustice of throwing on me the responsibility of adopting a course contrary to my judgment, and calculated, as I believe, to defeat the very purpose for which it is asked: viz., the providing of suitable facilities, and such as will be generally acceptable to those specially interested, for the higher education of women. Having thus fulfilled my duty in endeavouring to lay the case clearly before you, I have only to add, that whatever the Government or the Legislature shall determine, it will be my earnest endeavour to carry out with all possible efficiency.

I have the honour to be,

Dear Sir,

Yours respectfully,

DANIEL WILSON.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,

March 12th, 1884.